

## **The Movements in the Night** by missus\_e

**Category:** Stranger Things (TV 2016)

**Genre:** Anxiety Attacks, Brother-Sister Relationships, Coping, F/M, Family Feels, Gen, Grief, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder - PTSD, Supernatural Elements

**Language:** English

**Characters:** Barbara "Barb" Holland, Jonathan Byers, Mike Wheeler, Nancy Wheeler, Steve Harrington, Will Byers

**Relationships:** Eleven/Mike Wheeler, Jonathan Byers/Nancy Wheeler, Nancy Wheeler & Barbara "Barb" Holland, Nancy Wheeler & Mike Wheeler

**Status:** In-Progress

**Published:** 2016-07-27

**Updated:** 2016-07-27

**Packaged:** 2022-03-31 22:29:18

**Rating:** Teen And Up Audiences

**Warnings:** Graphic Depictions Of Violence

**Chapters:** 2

**Words:** 2,451

**Publisher:** archiveofourown.org

**Summary:**

It'd be easier to move on if anything were ever normal again. But as Nancy deals with the aftermath of losing her friend, and all that went with it, she realizes normal was never really an option.

# 1. Chapter 1

## Author's Note:

SO HEY, I finished the show last night and now I'm a wreck. More to come, but right now I'm just putting this up, and I'll go through it again later (huzzah internet!)

PLEASE let me know what you think and how I can improve, I'd appreciate it.

Note on the pairings, it will eventually be Nancy/Jonathan, but right now I just wanted to work out her headspace.

For now, enjoy.

She wonders, sometimes, what Barbara would say now that she and Steve are together, like really, *actually* together. On the good days, she can see the way Barbara would roll her eyes, a half-formed grin. "About time. I knew the 'just friends' line was full of crap." She can remember how her friend, exasperated, apprehensive, but always, *always* there, sat on her bed while Nancy pulled out top after top from her closet. "Do you think this makes me look... fat?" she'd mused quietly, more to herself really, before she remembered who was in the room with her. But Barbara always took those things in stride, always seemed to embrace herself, at least when they were alone. Nancy loves that about her... loved.

It's those tense changes that get her every time. The change from present to past that snatches her by the arm, spins her around, and forces her to watch Barbara, standing at the foot of the stairs, angry, scared, and hurt.

Barbara, sitting on that diving board alone.

Barbara, being *devoured*—

She can't.

She can't, she can't, she can't.

---

It takes her probably less time than it should to forgive Steve. She feels guilty for it sometimes, how all it took was two weeks of soft looks and repeated apologies.

The first week after Will came back seems like a fever dream now. She shut down her emotions and shoved back the nightmares so she could take care of things. Mike, Jonathan's burned up house, that she felt partially responsible for, all of these things to look after.

She throws herself into studying. She couldn't let something like this destroy her life after all. She was stronger than that. Barb was stronger than that. The tears would well up, her chest would feel like it was on fire, but that would pass, right? And if she worked hard, it would go by quicker.

At first she'd check on Mike before bed, knocking on his door, asking him how things were. He wasn't much up for talking then, and so she'd retreat back into her room, wishing that he'd be venerable with her so she could be the same with him.

Often in those first few days she thought about calling Jonathan, and asking him to come over. But she thought of his brother, how Jonathan hadn't been at school because he was still too worried about Will, and she decided against it.

She would sleep alone.

One night Steve appeared at her window, concern bearing down on his shoulders, fear in his eyes. She wondered if he was afraid because of what they'd seen, or if he was afraid she was going to tell him to get lost.

She didn't, of course. That night she let him hold her while she slept. She almost felt safe, but the nightmares still came, and she knew then there was no true escape. No one was going to be able to help her, not Steve, not Jonathan, and certainly not Barbara.

---

She hears things go bump, and her heart beat races. She closes her eyes, and she sees the grey and rotting world cozied up next to hers. When she dreams, she dreams of monster eating her, eating her friend.

And sometimes, she'll dream of a little girl in an old pink dress, singing the Clash.

---

Maybe she should have given herself more time to get over Barbara, to really *feel* that gapping hole in her life that was her best friend. But when Steve keeps showing up at night, to hold her, to keep her as safe as he can, she lets herself sink into him.

He has his own life of course. An asshole dad, a disapproving mother. His own interests and hobbies.

She has those too, but he doesn't like them very much, and being with him is so much better than being *alone*.

---

Sometimes she sees Jonathan Byers at school. It's not like their paths crossed all that frequently before, so if she does see him it's across the hallway or in the cafeteria. She'll look around, with Steve's arm draped across her shoulder, and catch his eyes, mournful and resigned. But he'll smile at her, and she'll smile at him. She wonders if he took her photo now, what he'd think she was saying.

Sometimes she'll get up and talk to him, but the conversation is rarely anything special. From the way they speak, you'd think they were just casual acquaintances catching up, the way her mom will speak to people she meets in the supermarket.

Every once in a while he asks how she's sleeping. How she's doing with Barbara. She'll swallow the truth and tell him she's fine, because she knows he's doing the same.

She feels drawn to him, like her chest is connected to him by a rope or a magnet. She sometimes closes her eyes and imagines what it would be like to be held by him. Would it be safe? Would she feel comfort?

Would it alleviate her guilt?

The worst of it is, she doesn't have a clue what Barbara would think about it.

---

Her grades are suffering, and her parents think it's either because of grief, or Steve. She knows so, because she hears them arguing about it in the kitchen.

"Well if she spent less time with that *boy*—"

"Steve seems like a good kid—"

"Oh come on Ted, you have to see that something is going on with them."

"All I know is that the only time I've seen my little girl smile in the last few months is when she's with him."

She goes back up to her room as quietly as she can, ignoring the pounding in her ears. She feels trapped, and that feeling is all consuming. Her hand is shaking by the time she reaches for her doorknob, she can't breathe—

"Nancy?"

She spins around: it's Mike. He watches her suspiciously from the doorway to his own room, but it's a concerned kind of suspicion. The kind that doesn't believe you when you say you're alright.

She tries anyway. "Yeah? What's up?"

"You just... are you okay?"

"I'm fine."

"Okay... are you sure?"

"Yeah. Totally fine."

He doesn't move, like he's stuck between two actions. He decides on one, comes over, and loops his skinny arms around her middle briefly before pulling away. "I'm sorry about Barbara."

She can't help the tears that boil over, but she tries to control them, even a little. "Thanks Mike. I'm sorry about Eleven."

He nods, the weight of the world back on his bony shoulders. It makes Nancy cry even more. "Do you—" she tries, sniffing back the tears. "Do you miss her?"

Mike nods. "Yeah."

She realizes that Mike loved Eleven, in the pure way that only belongs in childhood, the way she wishes she could love Steve, or Jonathan, or anybody really. But her heart is broken, and without her friend there to help her she wonders if she'll ever feel love again.

But right now she loves her brother, so before he can turn around and retreat into his room she grabs his shoulders and hugs him as hard as she can.

---

That night Steve doesn't make it, and so she closes her eyes reluctantly, knowing that she's only going to get a few snatches of sleep anyway if the nightmares have anything to do with it.

But that night, for the first time in weeks, she doesn't dream of monsters. She dreams of Eleven, sitting in the shadow world of their basement underneath the blanket fort Mike made for her weeks ago.

Her hair is growing out, and the dress she borrowed from Nancy is dirty, fraying. Eleven holds the walkie-talkie in her hands, crying and unmoving.

The light around them is cold, the world decaying and falling apart around them. She wonders how this little girl can stand being in such an evil place, but then she hears Eleven speaking to herself: "Friends..."

Without warning Eleven looks up, and Nancy knows without a doubt that this is not a dream.

"It's okay. Friends protect each other."

Nancy wakes up with her heart racing.

## 2. Chapter 2

She catches Will coughing up slugs in their bathroom on a Thursday night.

“What the hell?!”

The boy spins around, white with terror. “Nan—” but he starts coughing again, and she runs over to pat his back while he throws up another wriggling worm into the sink.

“You can’t tell anyone,” he says immediately after wiping his mouth with the back of his sleeve.

“What? No way!”

He shushes her, but the blood is pounding in her ears, her chest is tightening— “Will!”

“Please, *please*---“ He’s pleading with her, but all she can think about is that slug that’s still in her sink pipes, the *thing* that is from the Upside Down that will grow and grow and—

Her vision starts to spot, and the next thing she knows she’s on the floor of the bathroom with this little boy sitting next to her, calming her down in a soothing voice that reminds her so much of his brother. It takes her a while, but she fights to hang on: she needs to know what’s happening.

“What was that?” she asks through gritted teeth.

Will looks away from her, stares at his hand on her shoulder. “It’s nothing---“

“The hell it is.” Her voice is sharper than she intended. When he flinches, it reminds her that she’s not the only one who’s freaking out right now. “I’m sorry,” she tries again. “I just—“

“Yeah, I know.” His tone is so defeated. It deflates him, and he sinks back against the other side of the wall. “I just... I just don’t want my mom finding out. Or my brother.”



He said it was an afterthought, but it sounds like an accusation, like he knows all of her secret thoughts about Jonathan, thoughts she holds close to her at night when Steve has his arm wrapped around her waist.

“Will... we have to tell someone.”

He shakes his head. “No, we don’t. It’ll go away.”

“How do you know?”

“It’s already getting better,” he says, but by the casual tone of his voice she knows he’s lying. That’s the voice he uses on her mom when he’s covering something up.

“How long has this been going on?”

He shrugs. “Since I... since I got back.”

A meaty fist pounds on the bathroom door. “Hey Will, what’s taking so long?” Dustin’s voice comes through.

“I’m coming!” the boy shouts back. He gets up from the ground and looks Nancy dead in the eye. “You can’t tell anyone.”

He leaves before she can say anything back.

---

That night she can’t sleep, so instead she goes to the bathroom and fishes around in the sink pipe, her heart skipping every time her wire coat hanger catches on something. After an hour it’s clear she’s not going to find anything, but she doesn’t go back to her room. She goes to the basement.

Mike still has Eleven’s blanket fort set up, although it’s clearly caving in a bit. She wonders how long he’ll keep it like this, or if her mom knows it’s there.

The walkie-talkie is sitting on a pillow, waiting patiently for someone to use it. Nancy decides that tonight, it’ll be her.

Gingerly she sits among the pillows, aware that she’s disturbing some

kind of holy shrine. But from what Mike's told her, from what she's *seen*, Eleven is the one who could help with Will. So she picks up the walkie-talkie, then quietly clicks it on.

"Eleven?" The name breaks the silence, and now she feels the need to send other words out into the empty void to keep it company. "Eleven, are you there? It's Nancy... Mike's sister."

She releases the button on the side, and waits for a response. There isn't any.

"Eleven—El. El, something is wrong with Will. And... you have to help."

The silence that answers her is deafening. This is stupid. At worst, she's talking to nothing. At best, she's talking to a twelve year old girl.

She swallows back the tears that *just won't stop coming*, and clicks the button again, knowing that what she was about to do was a pointless exercise. "... Barbara?" She feels foolish the moment she says her name, but now that she's started, she can't stop. "I know you're not there, but—I need help. I need to know what to do. Please."

A noise jumps up from the dark, but she realizes it's coming from the stairs. "Nancy, what are you doing down here?"

Mike stands at the top of the stairs, his eyes still sleepy until he sees what she has in her hands. "What are you doing with that?"

"Nothing," she says quickly, putting the walkie talkie down on the pillow.

"Did you hear something?" His voice is hopeful, and it breaks her heart.

"No. I just... wanted to talk to her."

"You wanted to talk to El?"

Nancy shakes her head. "No. I... I wanted to talk to Barbara." *Even though she's dead.*

Mike's eyes grow wide in the dark for a moment, before he nods. "I... I sometimes try to talk to El. But it doesn't work. I don't think the signal's strong enough, without..." He trails off, and glances back at the blanket fort over her shoulder. Nancy looks back, remembering how lost and alone Eleven had looked in her dream, sitting in that cold light. She wonders how often her brother has come down here and felt the exact same way.

*Friends protect each other.*

"Hey," she says, putting her arm around his shoulder. "I'm sure she can hear you, wherever she is."

Mike doesn't take the bait, but he smiles at her gratefully none-the-less.

Nancy hesitates, then hugs him to her side. "You wanna sleep in my room tonight?" she asks quietly.

He glances up at her. "Isn't Steve in there?" It wasn't an accusation, it was an honest question. Oh, how the times have changed.

She shrugs. "He stopped coming over a few weeks ago."

"But aren't you guys still...?"

"Yeah. But it's hard to sleep when your girlfriend keeps waking up with night terrors."

Mike glances away, but nods. "Yeah, okay."

They snuggle up together under her comforter, the way they used to do on family camping trips. Mike drifts off pretty quickly, but Nancy can't help but lie awake, watching as the cares of the world slipped off her brother in sleep. *Friends protect each other.*

She hadn't been able to protect Barbara. But maybe, if she tried, she could protect the people she still had.